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Genealogical Society of
Washtenaw Co., Mich. Inc.

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 OCTOBER 1998

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

KAREN'S COLUMN:
BEFORE, AFTER PICTURES SHOW PROGRESS; THANKS TO ELLA, OUR 'GARDENING ANGEL'; PLEASE SIGN QUILT

We are making progress! Witness the before ,during and after pictures of Exhibit Room 1 (the parlor) at the Museum on Main Street. The newly plastered walls, intact ceiling, renovated windows and patched floors shown here and throughout the house have made a big difference. Carpentry work in the bathroom downstairs and kitchenette upstairs is scheduled to begin in the next few weeks.

Now, that the work outlined in our grant, is complete we are actively seeking some volunteer help with the final stages of the project. We need to conserve our funds as much as possible and could use someone who likes to paint, to begin working on the downstairs ceilings.

We also need someone who can help with clean-up in the basement. Everything that was once upstairs has ended up in the basement. Not all of it can remain there!

Once we are open, we will need a handy person (or persons) who can take care of minor repairs, etc. If you would like to become more involved with the Historical Society and could help out in these ways, you would be very welcome. Please call the Society (669-0902) and leave a message or call me directly.

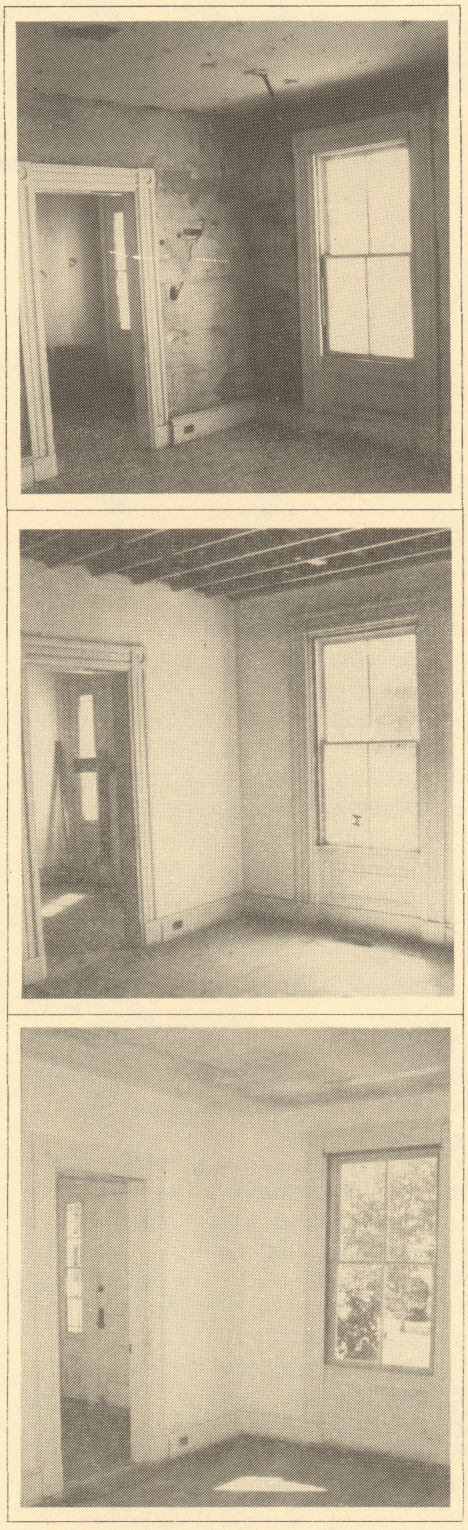
Another way you can help, if you haven't yet, is to sign our quilt. There is room for 60 or more signatures ($20 donation). We need to get all the blank patches filled so that it can be quilted, finished, and ready to be hung when the Museum opens.

The quilt will be available for signing at the October meeting. If you cannot come to the meeting but would like to sign, please call to arrange a time when the quilt will be brought to you.

Ella Grenier, our *"gardening angel"* since 1995, is going to retire from this job as soon as the garden is put to bed for the winter. Ella, we can't thank you enough for the wonderful and dedicated job you have done. The garden always looks wonderful.

Others have noticed too. In 1996 Ella received a Golden Trowel Award from the Ann Arbor Parks Advisory Commission. This recognition is given to outstanding gardens visible from the street. Many, many thanks to Ella for all she has done If you enjoy gardening here is another volunteer opportunity. We will be needing a new person to head up the garden this spring. Let us know if you like to garden. You don't have to do it all by yourself but we do need someone to be in charge, someone with garden ideas and enthusiasm! Again, call the Society or myself.

Karen O'Neal, 665-2242



Photos by Karen O'Neal

From top: Before, during, and after.

CARPENTER TOOL COLLECTOR WILL SPEAK OCTOBER 18

Allan Pearsall, an avid tool collector, will display and discuss carpentry tools commonly used during the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries at the October WCHS meeting.

It will take place at the Dexter Historical Society Museum, 3443 Inverness, Dexter, at 2 p.m. Sunday, October 18. Entering Dexter on Dexter-Ann Arbor Road turn right onto Inverness at St. Andrew's Church. The museum is in the former frame church building.

WCHS HAS 96% OF POINTS NEEDED FOR MEMORY BOOK

WCHS now has 19,268 points, 96% of the 20,000 needed for a memory book to record names of donors to our Museum on Main Street.

Anyone who eats at Bill Knapp's Restaurants may request a yellow points slip from the cashier each time. One point is given for each dollar spent. Please give or send to Alice Ziegler, 537 Riverview Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

WCHS NEEDS EDUCATION, MUSEUM SHOP CHAIRS

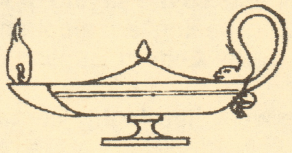
The Education chair person arranges rental of WCHS's loan boxes on *"Life Before Electricity"* and *"From Hats to Spats"* to teachers and presents its *"What's It "* games to school classes and adult groups.

The Museum Shop chair person would be in charge of the gift shop. Until the Museum on Main Street opens the shop is portable with items for sale at regular program meetings.

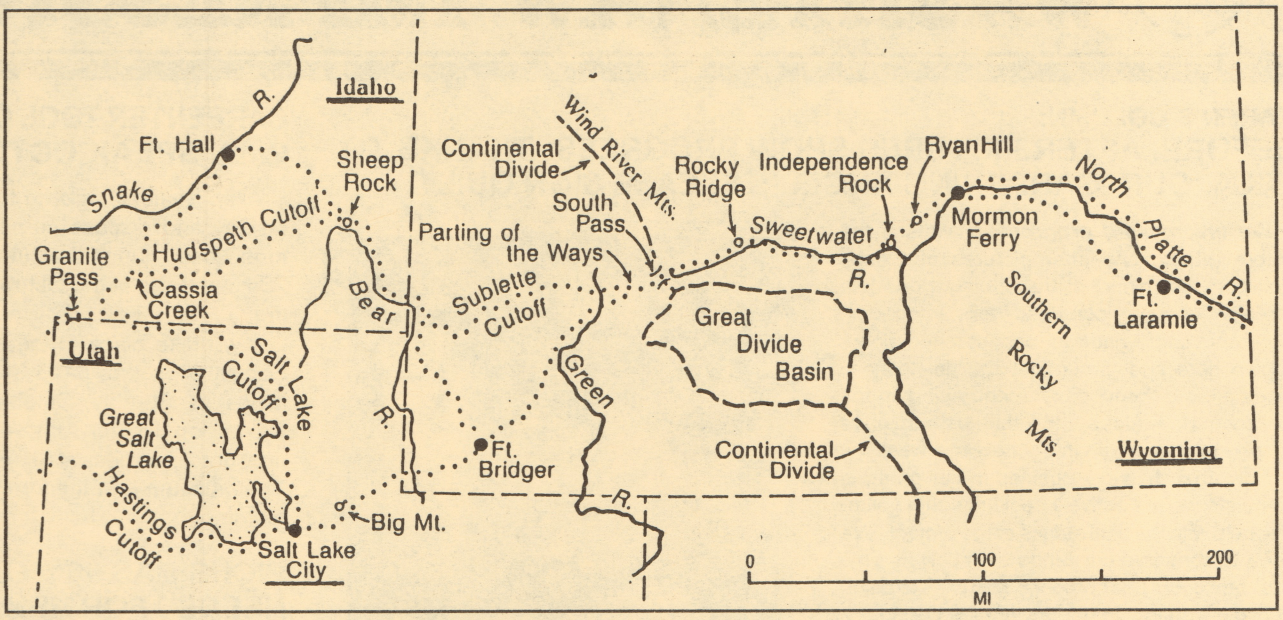
If you would possibly be interested in either position please call (734) 662-9092 for more information.

NOVEMBER TOPIC TOLD

Dr. Patricia S. Whitesell will talk about "The Restoration of the Detroit Observatory at the University of Michigan" at the November 15 WCHS program. Location to be announced.



ANN ARBOR'S 49ERS FOUND HUNGER, DISEASE, ACCIDENTS ALONG GOLD RUSH TRAILS TO CALIFORNIA



Nineteenth century historians agree that there were two events that excited more interest than any other in that century--the Civil War and the California gold rush, Dr. Russell Bidlack told the September WCHS audience.

Next year will be the 150th anniversary of the gold rush.

A lot of Civil War soldiers wrote home and there's a vast collection of their letters preserved at Bentley Historical Library. Countless letters also were written back home by gold seekers.

"Because of the gold fever and general interest many were published in local newspapers, most of them weeklies in small towns."

Dr. Bidlack, retired dean of the former School of Library Science, now the School of Information, ran across such letters while doing research in the 1950s and published a little book, *Ann Arbor in the 1849 Gold Rush: Letters Home*.

"I am sure some of you know the popular saying at that time and for years to come was that when somebody went somewhere dangerous like a Civil War battle and wrote home about surviving he would say 'I have seen the elephant.'

"Over and over the 49ers, after they got to California or found their first nugget, feeling that they had had the great experience, would say 'I have seen the elephant.'

"The saying started with the great Tower of London. When people could go to London, visit the tower and see the caged lions, they figured they had had a great experience. There were lions already in America but there weren't any elephants so the saying gradually changed to seeing an elephant, according to the Oxford English dictionary.

"There were five highly literate, interesting and prominent men from Ann Arbor, no women, no children, who started out for California in 1849. Twice that many went the next two or three years but the 49ers were most interesting, I think.

"These five men, with some associates I'll mention later, were prominent in their own day.

"George Corselius was one. He had a daughter who became a famous teacher and better remembered than he. Others were Dr. Caleb Ormsby, a popular physician of the time; Dr. Thomas Blackwood, a homeopathic physician; David T. McCollum, a merchant; and D.C. Davidson, a mason and bricklayer.

"Some younger men went with the older men. Ann Arbor founder John Allen, just missed being a 49er. He left Ann Arbor January 24, 1850. Corselius was first to leave Ann Arbor in mid-January 1849.

"It all began when a man named James W. Marshall was working for a man named John Sutter. Marshall had been hired to build a mill in a vast area Sutter had acquired. Sutter expected to make a great deal of money on his land.

"In January 1848, Marshall was walking along the mill race, which had just been completed, making sure it was flowing properly when he saw something shiny. He bent over and picked it up. It was a gold nugget about the size of his thumb nail.

"He showed it to Sutter who immediately wrote in his diary that this was going to be a dangerous discovery. The last thing he wanted was gold-seekers trampling over his land looking for gold. That was exactly what happened.

"Both Marshall and Sutter came to bad ends financially as a result of Marshall's discovery. But with Marshall's single act of discovering a gold nugget the beginning of the California gold fever came.

"By March 1848 the rumor had spread to San Francisco 40 miles from the American River where they were building the mil race.

"People began dropping everything they were doing to go look for gold. By mid-year sailors going around the horn of South America were relaying their rumors on the east coast.

"In September 1848 an article appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* telling about this discovery in California.

"Then in December President Polk made it official in his message to Congress. Remember that the war with Mexico was just ending and had been a great drain on the treasury.

"Polk quoted a report from a Colonel Mason, military commandant in recently acquired California. Mason wrote to the president there is more gold in the country drained by the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers that will pay the cost of the war a hundred times over.

"By the autumn of 1848, the rumors had reached Michigan but at a time when Lewis Cass, Michigan's favorite son, was running for president. More attention was given to that than faraway California until Cass was defeated.

"On December 7, 1848, there was an item in the Detroit Gazette that President Polk had made this announcement. On December 15 the reference to gold by Colonel Mason was in the *Gazette*. They also noted they had received a letter from around the horn from Anthony Ten Eyck, formerly of Detroit, then commissioner to the Sandwich Islands.

"He actually sent some lumps and scales of the precious stuff as they described them in the *Gazette*. His samples definitely brought the fever to Michigan.

"Amazingly there were three weekly newspapers being published in Ann Arbor in 1849, all published on Wednesdays--*The Michigan Argus*, *The True Democrat* and the *Washtenaw Whig*. You can tell from their names what their politics probably were.

"They had no direct information. At that time weekly newspapers exchanged with other papers, particularly on the east coast. They reported discovery of gold under such headings as 'The Golden Region,' 'California Riches,' 'Prodigious Gold' and 'Startling Accounts from California.'

"It is interesting to note that like England we were on the gold standard so the amount gold was worth was set by law. No matter how much gold was discovered in California you would get $15 an ounce for it.

"Business men soon discovered ways to make money on this back home. A man in Detroit announced by the end of December in an advertisement that he could get a gold meter for anybody that would assure success when you got to California for $3. It looked like a forked stick used to find water.

"A gold seeker's guide would be sent along free by mail, closely enveloped and sealed, therefore not subject to inspection by the postmaster.

"There were three ways a person in Ann Arbor could go to California. One was by way of the Isthmus of Panama. That cost about $180 and took about six weeks they thought. "Another way was to take passage from New York and sail around the horn of South America.

That was about $175 and took about six months. Or you could go across the plains from the Missouri River. They thought that was about 2,000 miles.

"Of course, that would require animals to pull the wagon and ride, animals to butcher for food. They figured that would cost about $400 to outfit your wagon and take about four months.

"It is estimated that around the country 50,000 persons went to California in 1849, 30,000 of them overland. That year they took out $40 million in gold. By 1853 they were taking out $200 million a year in gold.

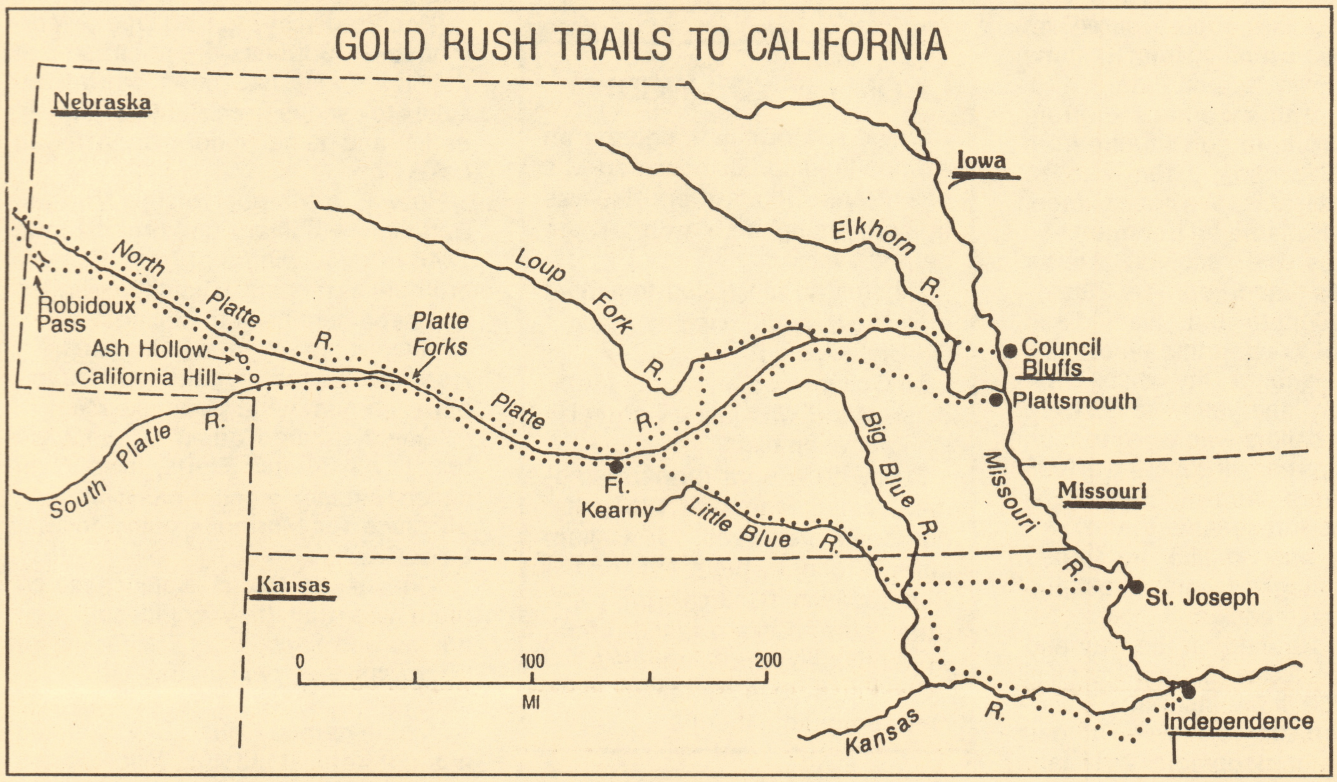
"The first to leave Ann Arbor was George Corselius in January 1849. He was a printer, a politician, a book seller. He wanted to be state librarian but he never got the appointment. "From my point of view he was interesting because he prepared the first catalogue of books for the University of Michigan. He was married and had four children. "He chose the isthmus route because he wanted to get there fast. He had lost a great deal of money and he was ill with consumption. He knew that the sun would help the disease. He didn't know that leisure was also required. He thought he could serve a double purpose--get rich and restore his health by going to California.

"A few months before this the Atlantic Steamship Company managed to get three steamships around the horn and they would go between Panama City on the Pacific side and San Francisco, primarily to carry passengers but even more important to carry mail.

"By taking a mule across or walking across the isthmus you could get there and back quicker than any other way. So, knowing this, Corselius planned to go to New Orleans and from there to Chagres on the Atlantic side of the isthmus.

"It was roughly 60 miles across the isthmus. He thought he could get to California in about two months.

"He carefully worked it out because he didn't have a great deal of money.



He figured it would take $30 to get to New Orleans; from there to Chagres, $40; crossing the isthmus, $10; and from Panama City to San Francisco maybe $100; so $180 would get him to the gold fields.

"Corselius's letter to the editor of the *True Democrat* appeared on February 21. It had been written from New Orleans February 1. He was very optimistic because people assured him steamships were running from Panama City to San Francisco on time.

"He joined with six other men from Utica, New York, to go with him from Chagres. 'We carry a tent and a supply of provisions. We hope to meet the steamer Panama on February 15.'

"In April his wife received a letter from Chagres dated February 23 saying he was about to start. He had had a lot of sickness up to that time.

He got to Panama City where cholera, dysentery and yellow fever were raging. The sailors who were to man the steamships had all deserted to look for gold. There were no steamships coming in the foreseeable future.

"Corselius was so sick he turned back and managed to get across the isthmus by mule back and took a ship back home. He died on the way and was buried at sea May 10. Mrs. Corselius collected $200 in life insurance.

"The second 49er to go was Thomas Blackwood, a homeopathic physician. He was not popular with regular physicians like Dr. Ormsby. He had a wife and four children.

"He was originally from New York so he thought of going by way of Cape Horn. He went to New York and took passage on a vessel named Loo Choo March 8. They promised they'd get him there in six months.

"He wrote from Valparaiso, Chile, where they had stopped for further supplies. When it arrived in Ann Arbor months later, at least Mrs. Blackwood knew he had got that far.

"Dr. Blackwood wrote a number of interesting letters but what he wrote about was typical ocean travel not unlike other journeys before and after.

"But I want to tell you about the other 49ers, the nine including the men who went with them across the plains, had very exciting experiences.

"During the 1840s there had been other travelers across the plains--a number of settlers going to Oregon and, of course, the Mormons going to Salt Lake in 1847 but somehow or other very few people from Ann Arbor knew how to get there so most 49ers had many questions.

"How far is it? There were various estimates of 2,000-3,000 miles. What equipment do we really need to get across the desert and mountains? Do we know the trail to take when we get to Missouri? Are there any maps or guide books? What time of year is best to go?

I WON'T IF YOU WON'T

David T. McCollum, one of Ann Arbor's leading businessmen was one of Ann Arbor's 49ers. He was in partnership here with a man named Ward.

"There's an interesting document at Bentley Library concerning them," Dr. Bidlack said.

McCollum was an ardent Methodist, Ward was just as ardent a Congregationalist.

"They drew up a formal agreement dated March 14,1831, that has been preserved. McCollum agreed to not speak evil of the Congregational Church in this place (their store) if Ward would refrain from ridiculing the Methodists.

Religious denominations were more emotional then!

"There was a general assumption that you would start at the Missouri River. Kansas was then an unorganized territory with no government.

"Guess what they feared most? Indians. But everyone writing home talked about how there weren't any Indians. Those 30,000 49ers crossing the plains scared the Indians to death. They might see one in the distance but never an encounter.

"They all went well armed with rifles and revolvers but didn't need them at all for Indians. They used them for other things.

"On January 24,1849, a long article appeared in one of the Ann Arbor newspapers by a man named Samuel Gould who said he would guide as many as 100 people or more across the plains for a fee because he knew how to get there. He had been there twice.

"He said it was 2,700 miles. He said they could make 25 miles a day--considered a very good travel rate then--and he guaranteed he would get them there in 108 days.

"He would furnish everything for this fee except each person was supposed to bring a horse, two blankets, rifle and revolver, plenty of ammunition and an extra $100 in their pocket after they had paid his unspecified fee.

"Those who were interested were to meet at Hawkins's Tavern in Ypsilanti at 3 o'clock Saturday, January 27,1849. He did go but he did not organize an expedition.

"People discovered he was a Mormon and Mormons were not trusted at that time. He had been one of the saints to escape from Nauvoo, Illinois, earlier and he had indeed been in Salt Lake City.

He was a member of the Mormon Battalion, a military unit organized in 1846 to try to win favor from the government by helping to fight the war. He had been sent back to Michigan to try to convert his wife and older children. He was unsuccessful and married another woman out in Salt Lake City.

"Gould favored going by what we today call Council Bluffs, Iowa, then called Kanesville. That was a jumping off place for Mormons going to Salt Lake City.

"One of the things Gould assured them was that they could sell their horses and supplies in California for twice what they paid for them in Michigan.

"A man named Robert Davidson did not go with Gould but followed his directions. Davidson was a mason and contractor with his brother James and the two of them are said to have built all of the heavy brick buildings in Ann Arbor at that time, including the county jail, in 1836.

"Davidson was 37 years old. His wife and six daughters were left behind. Of course he was physically fit and used to outdoor labor. He sold a house, besides the one his wife lived in, for $1,200 to pay for his outfitting.

"He did not trust that there would be opportunities to buy horses and wagons in Kanesville so he bought everything in Washtenaw before setting out. He started out in March.

"He did follow the route that Gould had recommended on the north side of the Platte River. That was terribly important because he was one of relatively few who, like the Mormons, traveled on the north side much of the way.

"Whereas cholera raged on the south side, no case of cholera has been documented on the north side.

"There was a newspaper published in Kanesville called the *Frontier Guard-*

ian. The editor was very clever because he would ask them to buy some copies and then he would promise to send them to their loved ones with a notice that their husband or father had gotten that far.

"So Davidson's name and two of his associates, two young men who decided to go with him, had their names published. Their name was Downer. The Downer brothers were much younger and I suspect, though I can't prove it, that Davidson paid the expenses of the two younger men. They left Kanesville May 5,1849.

"In the spring of 1849 a guide book had been published in St. Louis by a man named Joseph Ware. He called it the *Emigrant's Guide to California* and claimed to tell you how to get there. It made no mention of the route on the north side of the Platte.

"Actually Ware had never been to California though he talked to a lot of people who claimed they had. The guide was defective in many ways but a great many people had it.

"Ware strongly favored setting out from the town of Independence on the Missouri River. He made no mention of Kanesville.

"By the end of March 1849 one of Ann Arbor's leading business men, David T. McCollum, having read the guide, decided he would go to Independence.

"He was a bookkeeper and conveyancer which meant he could write up deeds. He was in partnership with a man named Ward.

"McCollum sold some land and got $2,500 to sponsor his adventure. He was in his 50th year--a rather old age for a man in those days. I think, though I can't prove it, that he was happy when a couple of young men went along, a young farmer named Charles Cranson and a man named C. M. Sinclair who was helping in the store.

"Unlike Davidson, McCollum planned to buy his animals and wagons at Independence assuming there would be plenty there and there were.

"He discovered, however, the prices were exorbitant and he also discovered there were about 23,000 other men waiting to cross the Missouri River into Kansas.

"A number of Missouri farmers made California fortunes selling supplies because, naturally, they raised the prices. Also, it was a late season in 1849 and the grass was not growing to feed the animals along the way.

"He had to pay $100 for a mule and

Digging and washing gold in California. From Monteith's *Manual of Geography Combined with History and Astronomy*, 1875.

two oxen cost him $50, many times what he expected to pay. He decided not to buy them because he discovered there were a couple of men named Turner and Allen who were pledging that they would get them to California in 80 days if they would sign up with them. They would organize a train called the Pioneer Line.

"They promised they would equip everything for $200. Then it was announced in the *Washtenaw Whig*, June 6, they had received word from McCollum that the Pioneer Line (carrying 20 passenger carriages, six men in a carriage and 18 wagons for baggage and supplies) left Independence for upper California May 9.

"Among the passengers were McCollum, Sinclair and Cranson.

"While waiting in Independence, McCollum found an old friend, Dr. Ormsby, who thoughtfully brought some letters from McCollum's family.

"Dr. Ormsby was born in Paris, New York, in 1801. He was a physician of the old school. He had been in Lenawee County as early as 1824 and later in Adrian when his wife died. He came to Ann Arbor in 1836 and married the widow of Anson Brown.

"Dr. Ormsby discovered an oversupply of physicians. A physician in those days had to have an alternative profession. He built Ann Arbor's first paper mill and did a number of other things including joining the Free Soil Party and being a candidate for Congress.

"At age 48 he left for California with two young men, his stepson, Edward Brown and a U-M student named Cyrus Hamilton. They went by way of Cincinnati where they picked up another young man, his nephew, the son of his sister, William Barry Mather, 18.

"Ormsby had arranged to meet a party of 24 other men from New England in Independence. He waited and waited and waited for them to appear and for the grass to grow. It was recognized that if you go in groups you were probably much safer.

"They were called the Boston and Newton Company. They left Boston on April 16,1849. Dr. Ormsby decided by May 12 that it was time to start so he left without them.

"He turned back to Independence one night just to see whether these other men had arrived. Ormsby said in a letter he went back on business but actually he went back to check on the men.

"Dr. Ormsby's letter was published in one of the local papers.

"'You will discover by the date of my letter (May 14) we are several days behind the date of my original calculation caused by the backwardness of this season, but this reason for delays no longer exists, and the swarm of emigrants, of men, women and children, of all characters and colors, with their thousands of mules, horses, oxen and cows, wagons, carts and spring carriages, are now putting forward for that great El Dorado of the West.'

"They hadn't yet seen a single Indian. It turned out the real dangers were diseases, cholera primarily, hunger, countless accidents and lack of grass.

"Cholera, an intestinal disease involving terrible diarrhea, was raging among the emigrants. Dr. Ormsby, being a doctor, had his theories. He said few deaths were reported in Independence until about May 6. On May 6, 7 and 8, a pretty general alarm was manifest. Deaths were common both among the emigrants and citizens.

"Gloom pervaded all classes. Even the gambling shops in town were closed on the Sabbath. You may think it very strange but it is no less true that the shutting up of the gaming houses on the Sabbath is an evidence of a major disaster.

"He then reported that he was not ill,

that what he was describing was a way of being sanitary which was a secret of avoiding cholera.

"There was no overland mail service so the family back home didn't expect to hear back from their emigrants until they had crossed over into California but a one-way mail service developed.

"All along the trail, all the way to California, people were constantly turning back for a variety of reasons. Late in June, much to her surprise, Mrs. Ormsby got a letter written June 2, 200 miles from Independence.

"'We have just met some California emigrants whose company has quarreled, disbanded and some of them returning. They have been 150 miles beyond here and have met no trouble from Indians.

'You probably wonder why we are no further advanced. The season is very unfavorable.'

"He says the Boston and Newton Company finally caught up with them but discovered they couldn't get along together and had separated.

"The emigrants tell us the famed Pioneer Line is now about ten miles in advance of us. This is the company that McCollum and his associates took seats with at $200 each for sake of expedition.

'We have gained three days travel on them in the last 100 miles and shall pass them in the fore part of the week.

'There is much sickness on the road. We pass some three to ten graves daily and the majority of the emigration is still behind us. I must close, drink my tea and make for the Post Office.'

"He rode back to catch these men who had turned back and gave the letter to them. They were from St. Joseph and promised to take it back.

"When Dr. Ormsby wrote, Dr. Blackwood was rounding Cape Horn. A fortnight before Ormsby and McCollum met at Fort Laramie. Dr. Blackwood wrote from Valparaiso.

"July and August passed in Ann Arbor without further word from the 49ers but early in September letters came to both Mrs. McCollum and Mrs. Ormsby, again carried back by men who were turning back.

"They wrote from Ft. Laramie, Wyoming, 700 miles from Independence.

'Now the news will be melancholy,' McCollum wrote.

"'He said Sinclair's health was good until after starting from our encampment on May 13. Then he was taken sick with a liver complaint, was well-taken care of for a number of days and, finally, died on the 30th of May and was buried on the west bank of the Vermillion River.

"C.C. Cranson was well until the 10th of June. Then he was taken sick with bilious fever and died on the 19th of June and was buried about four miles east of Ash Hollow, a spot in Nebraska that many 49ers mentioned, filled with ash trees and very beautiful.

THEY DIDN'T ALL MAKE IT

D.T. McCollum an Ann Arbor 49er, writes of his overland trip to California:

"I have endured hunger and thirst, heat and cold, wet and dry. I look more like an Indian than a white man. My hands are the color of brown mud and rougher than a hemlock board.

"I have seen but one Pawnee and one Sioux. They keep clear--they must fear the cholera.

"I have seen many die with it since I left home. Hundreds since they have started for California will be left in their graves on the plains and mountains. From Independence to here (Ft. Laramie) is a graveyard.

"Some days I have counted from four to 18 graves along the road.

"I have written this on the ground and poorly have I done it. I have just been bringing water from half a mile away and my nerves are unsteady."

'I am alone on the journey except strangers. The line is composed of 20 wagons, six persons each, and 20 baggage wagons all drawn by mules. We calculate it will take 60 days to get from here to Sutter's Fort.

'I ride about two-thirds of the time and walk the rest.'

"They were about to abandon their wagons and pack, that is leave the wagon. The pioneers all talked about how many wagons were left along the way.

"They were all going to reduce their luggage to 75 pounds per person and they would then walk, carrying their packs.

Three days later, Dr. Ormsby wrote to his wife. He had been traveling with another group of men but they had split up at Ft. Laramie. Whereas, these other men decided they would try to make it, Dr. Ormsby decided to rest.

"Ormsby wrote, 'Four of us have eight good animals. We shall ride four and pack four.'

"He tells of visiting various people as a doctor. He called on a Dr. Hodge from Jackson who was left by other men, paralyzed and dying. He talked to a woman who was staying with her husband. His head had been run over by a wagon. At first, she thought he was dead. She said he is a little better now.

"Others were left by their companies to die along the way. The cholera let up at Ft. Laramie. There wasn't much more after that.

"A whole group of men from Jonesville had lost 15 oxen when they led them to what they thought was a body of drinkable water. They all died on the spot. Then the Jonesville Company had to pack.

"Ormsby said Hamilton, the U-M student was sick with the ague but he, himself, had taken pills and was feeling pretty good. Barry, the nephew, was about the same and Edward, his stepson, was always ready to eat his allowance.

"He said we've learned that the Davidson Company passed here two weeks ago on the north side of the Platte.

"Like other 19th century physicians he was much interested in the natural science along the way. He wrote a long letter to his daughters back in Ann Arbor, Ann Amelia, 13, and Mary, 9, describing the flowers he had seen for the first time including a truly beautiful cactus growing in the shape of a pear, surmounted by a purple flower. He sent some specimens.

"There was no further word from McCollum and Ormsby until October 1849 when their families received letters written in September saying they had left Ft. Laramie and reached Mormon Ferry, 100 miles, in four days on June 7.

"Dr. Ormsby wrote to his wife on July 9, at this point we are all safe. I have just purchased an additional mule and got rid of 120 pounds of loading--stuff they had packed and were now throwing away.

'The climate is beautiful night and day--much high wind, no rain for the last two weeks, but scant grass. We shall pass close to the north end of Salt Lake.'

"Some of you, I am sure, have been to Independence Rock, a landmark on the Sweetwater River in central Wyoming where emigrants stopped to carve their initials which are still there today.

"Ormsby wrote again from the Continental Divide at South Pass in western Wyoming."

'We are camped at this point. There are probably 200 persons, men, women and children. You will think we are making slow progress which is true. Since leaving Ft. Laramie we have suffered for lack of forage for our animals. The whole country is parched by drought.'

"Ormsby was going toward Salt Lake and he gives an interesting account of his arrival.

"If you have never been to Salt Lake City you can perhaps imagine what it is like to come from this barren area down a canyon into this two-year-old settlement lush green with irrigation planting--quite a contrast.

Ormsby was one of about 500 emigrants who wanted to spend the winter in Salt Lake City but the Mormons were not anxious to have 500 guests for the winter. A Mormon explorer, Jefferson Hunt, claimed he knew a trail to Los Angeles. He agreed to lead a caravan which included 100 wagons and packers. They left what is now Provo, Utah, October 2, 1849. There were seven divisions, Ormsby in the first.

Mrs. Ormsby received the doctor's Salt Lake letter in January 1850 and had no further word until June when she received a long letter dated March 20,1850 from Weaver's Ranch, 80 miles east of Los Angeles.

"In April 1850, Dr. Ormsby wrote his sister in Cincinnati that her son, Barry, had reached San Diego in January but had contracted mountain fever (dysentery) and died on April 5,1850.

"Having passed unharmed the ravages of cholera and endured without a murmur or complaint the heat of summer and the vigors of winter, he has crossed his last desert, passed his last mountain and paid his last debt to nature and his body lies entombed on a secluded elevation in this beautiful valley," Dr. Ormsby wrote.

"Of the 12 49ers from Ann Arbor (including one from Cincinnati,) eight survived, one-third died. All Ann Arbor survivors reached their El Dorado and had 'seen the elephant' by the spring of 1850.

"Now a word or two about what happened to the surviving eight men. None got rich.

"Dr. Blackwood joined a company to dam the Tuolumne River. He was offered $50,000 for his share a couple of days before it started to rain. He did not sell. When it started to rain the unfinished dam gave way--everything was lost.

ROMANCE ON THE TRAIL

"While in Salt Lake City, Dr. Ormsby wrote a long letter and, in keeping with present times, he told a sex story.

He said Mr. L., a former clergyman, with his 18-year-old son, started for California with his neighbor, Major J., and his family. As the party progressed westward, the major got a notion in his head that the familiarity that existed between Mr. L. and his wife, Mrs. J., was greater than the nature of the case required.

"Quarrels ensued, threats were made and eventually Mrs. J. resolved to leave her husband and transfer to Mr. L.'s wagon. A son of Mrs. J., by a former husband, espoused his mother's cause and, while camping near Independence Rock, encountered his step-father (the major) during a hunting excursion.

"An argument ensued and the young man shot the major. The wounded man then made his way to a large company of Missourians to whom he presented himself as a victim of an assassin, covered with blood and haggard with terror and exhaustion.

"Dr. Ormsby spun out a long story and the upshot was Mrs. J.'s son (who did the shooting) kept out of sight but the Missourians proceeded to make a citizen's arrest of Mr. L. and his son.

"Ormsby closed his account 'Now, then, I think it furnishes good ground for a romance."

"Dr. Blackwood returned to Ann Arbor in autumn 1850. He still had gold fever and returned with his wife and children overland in 1851. He soon died in Sacramento of black erysipelas.

"McCollum returned to Ann Arbor in the spring of 1851 and lived until 1880.

"Robert Davidson returned to Ann Arbor by the isthmus in spring 1850. He died in Grand Rapids in 1911, age 90.

"The Downer brothers, who accompanied Davidson, went to Oregon. DeWitt Downer's wife and children joined him there in 1853. He was still living in 1890. James S. Downer died there in 1892, unmarried.

"Edward Brown, Dr. Ormsby's stepson returned to Ann Arbor by 1858 and became a resident of Pittsfield Township.

Cyrus Hamilton, the U-M student who accompanied Dr. Ormsby and froze his feet, moved to Idaho, then went to study dentistry at the Philadelphia Dental College in 1873 and practiced in Eureka, Nevada. He died in 1910 at age 87.

Dr. Ormsby remained in California seven years. He was involved in politics and was a member of the first Committee of Vigilance in San Francisco in 1851.

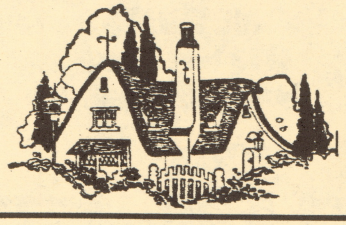
"He acquired some wealth. With his bag of gold he went to Panama in August 1857 and took the steamer Central America for New York on September 8,1857.

"The ship was caught in a hurricane 200 miles off Cape Hatteras. Though some survived there was a loss of 500 lives and $1.5 million in gold, according to the *Ann Arbor News and Advertiser*, September 29,1857.

"A gentleman who survived the catastrophe called on a daughter and sister of Dr. Ormsby at Cincinnati and related that he parted with the doctor just before the ship went down. The doctor requested him, if he survived, to seek out his friends, give them his blessing, and say to them that they would see him no more. His name does not appear among the survivors."

OLD HOUSE RESEARCH

WCHS president Susan Wineberg will speak on *"How to Research your House"* at the Old West Side fall meeting. It will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday, October 28, at Bach School, 600 W. Jefferson.



'ANN ARBOR'S FIRST LADY', 'HISTORIC BUILDINGS' AUTHORS TO SIGN BOOKS NOVEMBER 5 AT NICOLA'S

Three authors of two important books about Ann Arbor history will be on hand for a book signing from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, November 5, at Nicola's Books--A Little Professor Book Company store in Westgate Shopping center, Jackson at Maple Roads.

Dr. Russell E. Bidlack, retired dean of the University of Michigan School of Library Science, is the author of *Ann Arbor's First Lady: Events in the life of Ann I. Allen.*

Marjorie Reade and WCHS President, Susan Wineberg, are the authors of *Historic Buildings, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Second Edition.*

Ann Arbor was named for Ann Allen, wife of city co-founder John Allen. The book is being published by Bentley Historical Library. Dr. Bidlack, a past-president of WCHS, has done extensive research on the founders of Ann Arbor.

The second edition of Historic Buildings is much expanded. It pictures and tells the history of 178 buildings in Ann Arbor.

CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand-lettered certificates, framed if desired, are offered free of charge, by WCHS to organizations, businesses, churches, schools etc., for milestone anniversaries. Information: (734) 663-8826.

ARTIFACTS TO DONATE?

Anyone wishing to donate an artifact to WCHS may contact Judy Chrisman, collections chair, at (734) 769-7859 or by mail, 1809 Dexter Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

CRC TO GET NATIONAL AWARD

The Chelsea Retirement Community will receive an award for its Esther Kirn Heritage Room Museum from the American Association for State and Local History.

Laurie Dickens from the Association will present it at a tea at 2:30 p.m. Monday, October 19, at CRC. Further information: Connie Amick, administrator, (734) 475-8633.

HOW TO JOIN

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to WCHS Membership c/o Patty Creal, Treasurer, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336.

Annual dues are individual, $15; couple/family, $25; student or senior (60+),$10; senior couple, $19; business/association, $50; patron, $100. Information: (734) 662-9092.

AROUND THE COUNTY

Chelsea Historical Society: Depot Museum, Main Street at the railroad tracks, open 1-3 p.m. Saturdays or by appointment, 475-7047.

Salem Society: Janet Gagnon, Civil War buff and re-enactor, and her sister, Sharon Woolly, will talk on "Stories of the Olds Cemetery" at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, October 29, at Jarvis Stone School, Curtis and North Territorial Roads. (This is a week later than usual.)

Saline Society: Student reports and information on oral history at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 21 at Depot Museum off Ann Arbor-Saline Road at Bennett Street.

Webster Society: Storyteller Barbara Locks will entertain at 7:45 p.m. Monday, October 12, at the Blacksmith Shop on Webster Church Road.

Dr. Mark Hildebrandt will talk about trolleys in Washtenaw County at 7:45 p.m. Monday, November 9, in Webster Township Hall, 5665 Webster Church Road.

Ypsilanti Society: Museum, 220 N. Huron St., open 2-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Archives open 9 a.m.-noon, Monday-Friday.

Atwell-Hicks Inc., civil engineering firm, 540 Avis, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108 is co-sponsor of this issue of *Washtenaw Impressions*.

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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Post Office Box 3336
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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

'ANTIQUE TOOLS'

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